

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EUGENE DISTRICT OFFICE

DECISION RECORD

DOI-BLM-ORWA-050-2015-0022-EA

South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Fuels Reduction Decision Record

DECISION

Based on the analysis documented in the South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-ORWA-050-2016-0022-EA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and associated project record, it is my decision to fund the implementation of Alternative 2 for the South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction (SRTH WUI Project) as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA), including all applicable project design features (PDFs). The management decision is issued under the Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Subpart 4190.1 (CFR 4190.1) and is effective immediately upon signing of this decision.

PLAN CONFORMANCE

This proposed action is consistent with the Eugene District's 1995 Resource Management Plan (RMP) as amended, as well as all documents contained in the SRTH WUI project file.

The SRTH WUI Project adheres to national statutes and plans. In 2000, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior developed an interagency approach to respond to severe wildfires, reduce their impacts on rural communities, and assure sufficient firefighting capacity in the future. This report, known as the National Fire Plan, outlined a strategy to reduce wildfire threats and restore forest ecosystem health in the interior West. In 2001, Congress funded the National Fire Plan to reduce hazardous forest fuels and restore forests and rangelands. In response, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, along with the Western Governors and other interested parties, developed a 10-year strategy and implementation plan for protecting communities and the environment (Western Governors Association, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Interior, 2006). This plan, coupled with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, forms a framework of federal agencies, states, tribes, local governments, and communities to work together to reduce the threat of fire, improve the condition of the land, restore forest and rangeland health, and reduce wildfire risk to communities (U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Interior, 2009). The Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI) was launched in 2002 to reduce barriers to the timely removal of hazardous forest fuels. The HFI expedites administrative procedures for hazardous forest fuel reduction and ecosystem restoration projects on federal land. Sixteen months after HFI was introduced, Congress passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) to reduce delays and remove statutory barriers for projects on federal land that reduce hazardous forest fuels and improve forest health and vigor. The act also helps communities, states, tribes, and landowners restore healthy forest and rangeland conditions on state, tribal, and private lands. In response to requirements of the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement Act of 2009, the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) directed the development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy). The Cohesive Strategy is a collaborative process with active involvement of all levels of government and non-governmental organizations, as well as the public, to seek national, all-lands solutions to wildfire management issues (WFLC 2013). The SRTH Project adheres to the national direction for coordinated wildfire management in the Cohesive Strategy as well as previous initiatives.

RATIONALE FOR SELECTION

I have decided to provide funding to implement Alternative 2 because it best fits the purpose and need for action as presented in the EA. Additionally, implementation of the proposed action will reduce wildfire risk to the communities of Eugene and Springfield and its infrastructure, reduce the risk of fire ignited on City of Eugene/Willamalane land and spreading to the private/federal land, and improving fire management within and adjacent to these communities.

I have determined that:

- Vegetation, soils and other significant natural and human resources:

Springfield and surrounding Federal Lands;

- Public safety; and
- The current potential working environment for all wildland fire fighters

are all at substantial risk from the threat of wildland fire/wildfire.

I find that it meets all applicable statutory and regulatory duties and management direction. In making this decision, I have considered any comments BLM received, all analysis conducted by the Interdisciplinary Team, and documentation disclosed in the FONSI.

The proposed action, Alternative 2, is providing BLM funding for hazardous fuels reduction treatments and periodic maintenance of those efforts on 1,700 acres owned by the City of Eugene (City) and Willamalane within Eugene/Springfield's WUI. The objectives for treatment prescriptions are to decrease fuel continuity to reduce risk of large-scale fire event, reduce surface fuel loads, increase height to the base of live crowns, and facilitate on-going maintenance of treatment areas.

The types of treatment activities used to accomplish the project objectives would include:

- Thinning of small (<12 in. DBH) and medium (12-20 in. DBH) trees and shrubs
- Mowing and mastication of grass, weeds, brush, and other woody fuels
- Piling and burning of weeds, brush, and other woody fuels
- Chipping or grinding of small trees, brush, and other woody fuels
- Seeding and planting of propagules (native species)
- Propane flaming of non-native plants
- Prescribed burning to manage thatch and woody vegetation regrowth

Fuels reduction activities would be accomplished by both manual and mechanical methods.

Mechanical treatment methods would be conducted to be consistent with the Eugene District RMP for T&E and Bureau-sensitive species and habitat.

It is not the intent of the SRTTH WUI Project to treat every acre. Areas would be treated based on available funding, which may vary annually. Areas selected to receive fuels reduction treatments include historic grasslands (prairies and savannas) invaded by shrubs and trees at >5% total cover; historic oak woodlands affected by densely regenerating oak or invading conifers raising canopy cover to >50%, or by invasion of ladder fuels (shrubs >10% cover) reaching into the lower branches of the trees; and conifer forests where crowns are touching, mortality is occurring in suppressed trees, or conditions would result in flame lengths greater than 4 feet in height during a fire.

Areas demonstrating any or all of these conditions would be thinned to reduce tree density and lessen wildfire risk. Existing roads and landing areas may require maintenance prior to project implementation. Thinning would be limited to stems less than 20 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) and less than 80 years old.

I did not select Alternative 1 (No Action) because it did not meet the Purpose and Need as outlined in the EA (pg. 1).

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

No consultation is needed since there are no effects to any federally listed species or their critical habitat.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation for this Decision Record is anticipated to begin in summer 2016.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping

The development of the plans described above in Section 1.5 of the EA, specifically the Lane CWPP, Ridgeline Area Open Space Vision and Action Plan, and the Willamalane Park and Recreation Comprehensive Plan, gathered input from local experts, agency personnel, and the public.

The Lane CWPP process involved staff working collaboratively with fire protection districts and federal and state agencies to develop the plan, as well as outreach to the community. The steering committee used a three-tiered process to engage stakeholders:

- **Landowner Survey** - A survey was mailed to 1,500 randomly selected landowners from areas in Lane County in 2002. The survey questions were designed to gain information about landowners' perceptions of wildfire risk and assess their attitudes towards potential actions that communities and homeowners can take to reduce their risk of wildfire.
- **Stakeholder Interviews** - Conducted phone interviews in 2004 with key stakeholders to gain information about key issues, concerns, and current activities related to the Lane County CWPP objectives of collaboration, prioritization of fuel reduction projects, and treatment of structural ignitability.
- **Firewise Workshop** - Invited stakeholders such as agency staff, planners, developers, realtors, insurers, utility providers, and non-profit organizations to attend a Firewise Communities workshop in 2005. The workshop sought stakeholder participation in identifying obstacles and opportunities to reducing wildfire risk in Lane County.

The 2008 Ridgeline Open Space Vision and Action Plan was developed through a series of four workshops in 2006 and 2007, two of which focused on requesting public input at the beginning of the planning process, and two of which provided a draft of the plan and an opportunity to provide feedback on the planned goals, actions, and strategies. In addition to the public workshops, several presentations were made in 2007 to a wide spectrum of interest groups and organizations to receive input and feedback from those groups.

In the development of the Willamalane Park and Recreation Comprehensive Plan, community involvement was a critical part and a series of community activities were completed, including on-line community surveys (with a Spanish-language version), teen workshops, and outreach at Willamalane's largest community event – Springfield SummerFair. Over 2,000 participants were included in the planning process, including children and youth. In addition, the spring 2010 Recreation Survey included input from 710 residents. The community assessment and input was used to establish goals and strategic actions for acquiring land, improving and managing parks, natural areas, walking and biking trails, recreation facilities, and program opportunities for Willamalane over the next 20 years. Strategies and Actions are based on the Community Needs Assessment results.

Public Comment

The SRTH WUI Project EA was posted on Eugene District Planning website on June 24, 2016. An e-mail message was sent to all agencies, organizations, and individuals who had expressed interest in receiving either notification of all Eugene BLM projects. The BLM received one comment letter during the 15 day public comment period for the SRTH WUI Project EA. Written comments received in response to the SRTH EA were reviewed by the interdisciplinary team and responsible official and substantive comments are addressed in Appendix A of this decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

This decision is issued under the authority of 43 CFR 5003. Because it is a wildland fire management decision pursuant to 43 CFR 5003, the decision is effective immediately and can be implemented immediately. This decision record will be posted on the following ePlanning site https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do. Any person adversely affected by this decision may appeal it to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4. If an appeal is taken, a notice of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days of this decision for transmittal to the Board. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and with the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal was filed. A copy of a notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs, must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 805 SW Broadway, Suite 600, Portland, OR 97205.

Filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of this decision. If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision (see 43 CFR 4.21) during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

For further information, contact William O'Sullivan, Field Manager, Upper Willamette Field Office, Eugene District, Bureau of Land Management, 3106 Pierce Parkway Suite E; Eugene, OR 97477; 541-683-6287 or Michael Korn at Siuslaw Field Office; 541-683-6792.

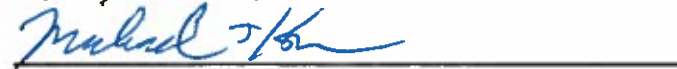
Signature of the Responsible Official:



William O'Sullivan
Upper Willamette Field Office Manager
Eugene District Office

7/13/16
Date:

Signature of the Responsible Official:



Michael J. Korn
Siuslaw Field Office Manager
Eugene District Office

7/13/2016
Date:

Appendix A

South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment

Response to Comments

The BLM received one comment letter during the 15-day public comment period for the South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Fuels Reduction EA (SRTH EA). Written comments received in response to the SRTH EA were reviewed by the interdisciplinary team and responsible official and substantive comments are addressed below. The BLM elected to respond to some non-substantive comments where it would improve the public's understanding of the project or planning process. In some cases the comments have been quoted directly from commenter's letters and in some cases they have been paraphrased. Comments were paraphrased for brevity, clarity, and/or where multiple commenters raised similar subjects.

Substantive Comments are those that:

- Provide new information pertaining to the Proposed Action or an alternative;
- Identify a new relevant issue or expand on an existing issue;
- Identify a different way (alternative) to meet the purpose and need;
- Identify a specific flaw in the analysis;
- Ask a specific relevant question that can be meaningfully answered or referenced;
- Identify an additional source of credible research, which if utilized, could result in different effects.

Non-substantive comments are those that:

- Primarily focus on personal values or opinions;
- Simply provide or identify a preference for an alternative considered;
- Restate existing management direction, laws, or policies that were utilized in the design and analysis of the project (or provide a personal interpretation of such);
- Provide comment that is considered outside of the scope of the analysis (not consistent or in compliance with current laws and policies, is not relevant to the specific project proposal, or is outside of the Responsible Officials decision space);
- Lack sufficient specificity to support a change in the analysis or permit a meaningful response, or are composed of general or vague statements not supported by real data or research.

1. Avoid using commercial logging to achieve fuels reduction objectives

Response: As outlined on page 11 of the EA, neither the City of Eugene (City) or Willamalane are interested in managing the treatment areas for forest productivity and the proposed fuels reduction activities are not a commercial venture. Commercial logging, in the traditional definition or terminology, is not part of this fuels reduction proposal. While the EA does acknowledge that there may be some areas treated that may result in trees that may have commercial value, these circumstances would be on a very limited bases and not on the scale of a traditional commercial logging operation (i.e. no roads constructed, no landings, no cable yarding). The EA outlines in the project design features on pgs. 14-16 what specific measures would be followed in the event that some of the treatments may produce trees that may be of commercial value. There are some treatment areas that the City/Willamalane have identified where fuels reduction objectives could not be realized without removing some tress that may have some commercial value and the EA simply describes the methods that would be used in removing any merchantable trees.

- 2. *The BLM should coordinate with landscape architects/ecologists to identify treatments areas. Treatments should be mosaics that enhance landscape diversity and special features.***

Response: The areas proposed for treatments were identified specifically by the City and Willamalane resource specialist and ecologists. As outlined in the PDFs there are a number of treatment options that are proposed to be used to restore the areas so that the BLM/City/Willamalane are not relying on one uniform approach. As the EA describes, the SRTH WUI project proposes up to 1,700 acres of vegetation removal for fuels hazard reduction, of which 940 acres involve removal of encroaching Douglas-fir, hardwoods, and invasive shrubs from historically more open oak woodland, savanna, and prairie habitats, approximately 735 acres involve removal of invasive species and small trees from conifer forest and woodland, and 25 acres are in hardwood woodlands. This approach would provide for a mosaic of treatments across the landscape

- 3. *The BLM should focus on removing non-native plants and minimize actions that would spread weeds.***

Response: The EA describes how the proposed action would treat non-native plants and how it would minimize the spread of noxious weeds on pages 20-27. Effects to native vegetative species are outlined and a description of effects to invasive vegetation is included.

- 4. *The project has the potential to be controversial and little has been done in regards to community outreach and the project should be integrated with recreation development.***

Response: As described in the EA pages 5-7, extensive public outreach was conducted in the development of City/Willamalane management plans that provide the framework for identifying the treatment areas. These include landowner surveys, stakeholder interviews, on-line surveys, and citizen workshops. These outreach efforts did not identify substantial public controversy. Future recreation trails were identified as a reasonably foreseeable action and included in the cumulative effects discussion, however, recreation trail development/construction was not included in the proposed action since it would not meet the purpose and need.

